



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Department of Health Investigates Food-Borne Illness Outbreak

BISMARCK – The North Dakota Department of Health is investigating a probable food-borne illness outbreak associated with two private events held last weekend, according to State Epidemiologist Kirby Kruger. Preliminary laboratory tests indicate that the illness is being caused by salmonella bacteria.

Early investigation indicates that more than 40 people became sick with a gastrointestinal illness after attending either a weekend reunion in Wilton, N.D., or wedding in Washburn, N.D., both catered by an unlicensed caterer. Reports indicate that at least nine people have been hospitalized, including two individuals in intensive care. At least 20 other people have sought care at emergency rooms or clinics. Ill people are reporting symptoms that include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramping and fever.

People who are ill and think they may be infected with salmonella are encouraged to contact their health-care provider.

“As in any food-borne illness investigation, we are looking at foods people may have eaten in common, as well as other possible connections we can identify,” Kruger said. “The Department of Health has not yet determined the exact source of this outbreak. Unfortunately, the source of a food-borne illness often is very difficult to determine.”

A food-borne illness investigation consists of interviewing people who are sick, conducting laboratory tests to determine what is causing the illnesses, and looking at food-handling procedures.

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People get salmonella by ingesting the bacteria, usually through contaminated food or water. Salmonella also can be transmitted from animals and environmental surfaces that have been contaminated with human or animal waste. People who are at risk for severe complications or infection of the blood (sepsis) include young children, the elderly, and people who have existing health conditions that weaken their immune systems.

“This outbreak is a reminder to all of us about how serious salmonella infection can be,” Kruger said. “Whether at a business, at home or at a picnic, we all need to handle and prepare food properly to prevent transmission of salmonella.”

The Department of Health recommends the following guidelines to reduce the risk of spreading salmonella:

- Wash hands frequently.
 - Before preparing food
 - After handling raw meats
 - Before eating
 - After using the bathroom
 - After handling animals
- Cook meats thoroughly.
 - 165° F for poultry
 - 160° F for ground meats, including hamburger
 - 145° F for roasts and steaks
- Cook eggs until the whites and yolk are firm.
 - Avoid recipes in which eggs remain runny or uncooked.
- Wash fresh produce before eating.
- Keep ready-to-eat foods separate from raw meats.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Do not cross-contaminate your foods. Use separate cutting boards and knives for meats and vegetables.
- Wash and sanitize cutting boards, utensils and food preparation surfaces thoroughly after contact with raw food products.
- Do not prepare meals if you are ill.

For more information, contact Kirby Kruger, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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